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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release



USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

"HELPING PEOPLE HELP THE LAND"

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CONSERVATION PROGRAMS SIGNUP DEADLINE EXTENDED

New Deadline for Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), & Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is January 29, 2006

Tennessee farmers and landowners are being given two additional weeks to sign up for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Conservation Programs. The original signup deadline of January 17, 2006 is being extended to January 29, 2006. State Conservationist James Ford says the extension is being granted to allow landowners more time to apply. "We want as many Tennessee farmers and landowners as possible to take advantage of these programs so they can improve conservation practices while increasing their land's productivity."

The programs affected are the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Nationally, these programs provide technical and financial assistance to landowners committed to protecting, improving and preserving their land. Significant enhancements to the programs have been implemented since last year, so applicants from previous years are encouraged to sign up again this year.

Administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), these conservation programs provide financial assistance to agricultural producers who will apply cost share and incentive practices which provide significant environmental benefit. In Tennessee, NRCS provides funding to each county to address local resource concerns.

This ranking period is the only one that is anticipated for fiscal year 2006, although applications for all three programs are accepted throughout the year. Applications received after January 29 will not be evaluated and ranked during fiscal year 2006.

Eligible practices include but are not limited to the following: stream bank stabilization, riparian forest buffers, cross fencing for rotational grazing, water tanks, heavy use areas, pipelines, and grade control structures. There is also an incentive payment available for those interested in installing an intensive rotational grazing system. Cost share rates range from 50- to 75-percent depending on the program. Those qualifying as Limited Resource Farmers receive 90-percent cost share, and Small Scale Farmers can receive up to 75-percent cost share.

Anyone interested in the EQIP, WHIP, or WRP programs can sign up at their nearest USDA Service Center or call NRCS-Tennessee at 615.277.2531

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